

The way of Trying Prophets.

A

SERMON

Preach'd before the

QUEEN

At St. JAMES's,

NOVEMBER 9. 1707.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Sermon being too long to be preach'd at once, those Parts of it which are thus enclosed [] were omitted when it was preached before the **QUEEN.**

LONDON:
Printed for W. Rogers, at the Sign against St. Dunstons
Church in Fleetstreet. MDCCLVII.

I J O H. IV. I.

Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits whether they are of God: because many false Prophets are gone out into the world.

AFTER that the *Christian Religion* had been sufficiently taught and prov'd by the Preaching and Miracles of our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*, it pleased God (for wise Reasons no doubt) to permit great Opposition to be made to the Truth and Purity of it; not only by its former professed Enemies, the *Jews* and *Heathens*, but likewise by some among the *Christians* themselves; some, I mean, who, overpow-er'd in a manner by that strong Evidence whereby *Christianity* in general had been confirm'd, could not avoid Conviction, nor, with any Ease in their own Minds, decline the taking upon them the Name of *Christians*; and yet, not liking nor relishing well that Submission and Obedience of the Understanding, and that Strictness of Life which it obliged them to, set themselves so to explain (that is, indeed, so to corrupt) the Faith of *Christ*, as to take away all that Mystery from its Articles of Belief which they could not well comprehend, and all that Strictness and Severity from its Precepts, which, as laying an ungrateful Restraint upon their Lusts and Passions, they found it hard to bring themselves to comply with.

The first of this kind that we meet with in Scripture, or Ecclesiastical History, was that Archheretick *Simon Magus*; but he was quickly followed by several others, his Disciples or Imitators; some of whom we find taken notice of by St. Paul, and the other Apostles, in their Epistles; and the Number of them was so increas'd before St. John's Death, who outliv'd all the other Apostles, that he says, in the latter Part of the Text, that there were then, *many false Prophets gone out into the World*. Upon which Observation he very reasonably grounds the Caution and Advice which he gives, in the former Clause of it; *Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits whether they are of God*.

[And if it was thus even in the Apostles Days, if even then, there were some (as St. Paul calls them)
 2 Cor. xi. 13. *false Apostles, deceitful Workers, transforming themselves into the Apostles of Christ*; 'tis no wonder that it has been so in the Ages since, or that it is so now. Nay indeed this is what we had great Reason to expect, Or rather, 'tis what we might be sure would be; because it had been expressly foretold long ago, by Prophets
 Mat. xxiv. 5, 24. *of unquestionable Authority. There shall arise false Christs, and false Prophets, says our Saviour, and many shall come in my Name, and shall deceive many. And, Of your own selves, also, says St. Paul, shall Men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away Disciples after them. And again, There must be also Heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. And, As there were false Prophets among the Jews, says St. Peter, so shall there be false Teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable Heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them. And many shall follow their pernicious Ways.*

And the Methods whereby these Seducers have endeavour'd, and indeed with too great Success, to draw
 Men

‘ Men from the Truth of the Gospel, have been various ;
‘ some have endeavoured it, by forging and setting forth
‘ *Gospels* and *Epistles* under the venerable Names of the
‘ *Apostles* ; This was an early Artifice, but thanks be to
‘ God, it was, by the Care and Vigilance of the first
‘ *Christians*, soon discover’d, and is now impracticable ;
‘ Others have done it by corrupting their genuine Wri-
‘ tings ; but this Fraud also has been seldom long unde-
‘ tected, and would in vain be now attempted any more :
‘ And others have endeavour’d the same by setting up O-
‘ ral Tradition as a Rule of Faith together with the Scri-
‘ pture, and as a necessary Supplement thereto ; and
‘ boldly affirming that all the Doctrines by them taught,
‘ which are not to be found in Scripture, have been de-
‘ liver’d down to them, from *Christ* and his *Apostles*, this
‘ way ; But this Method of Deceit has been likewise so
‘ fully laid open and confuted in the learned Writings
‘ of the *Protestants* against the Corruptions of the Church
‘ of *Rome*, that, it may reasonably be hop’d, there is lit-
‘ tle or no Danger of our now being deceived thereby.

‘ Nevertheless, there are two other Methods of De-
‘ ceit, which we are still, and always shall be, in Danger
‘ of ; the First is of those who wrest and pervert the
‘ Sense of Scripture, by a false Interpretation of it ; the
‘ other is of those who pretend themselves to be afresh
‘ inspir’d by God, in such Manner as the *Apostles* were.

‘ Against the former of which we may be in good Mea-
‘ sure secur’d, by constant Reading and diligent Study
‘ of the Holy Scripture ; and treasuring up, and deeply
‘ impressing on our Minds, those great Truths of Reli-
‘ gion, whether relating to Belief, or Practice, which are
‘ there clearly taught ; and resolving to admit of no In-
‘ terpretation of any more obscure or doubtful Texts (e-
‘ ven tho’ we have not Skill or Learning enough to shew
‘ the Falsity of such Interpretation) whereby Counte-
‘ nance

‘ nance seems to be given to any Opinion that is not according to the Analogy of Faith, or to any Practice that is not agreeable to that Strictness and Purity of Life which the Holy Gospel every where enjoins.

‘ And how we may be secur’d against the other Method of Deceit, viz. that of those who falsely pretend to Inspiration, is what we are taught in the Text, and will be my Business to explain and shew more at large in my following Discourse. *Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits whether they are of God, because many false Prophets are gone out into the World.*] Many false Prophets, says he, are gone out, that is, many that falsely pretend to the Teaching of the Spirit. For they were such false Prophets as these which the Apostle seems to have had chiefly in his Mind; and that I take to be the Reason why he calls them *Spirits*, as well as *Prophets*. *Believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits whether they are of God.*

And this Caution and Advice can never be given unreasonably; because as there were many such false Prophets in the World in the Apostles Time, so there have been ever since; and probably ever will be while the World shall last. Every Age has afforded Plenty of such *Enthusiasts*, whose Fraud, or Madness, or Folly, has in due time been made manifest unto all Men. And yet the continual Discoveries of former Cheats of this kind have not prov’d sufficient to discourage others from setting up the same Pretence to Inspiration, neither have they afforded to the People of following Times sufficient Caution to beware of the like Impostures.

For even now, after all the Experience that the World has already had in such Matters, there is a new Set of *Prophets* lately risen up among our selves; and as the wildest *Enthusiasts* have had, so have these also, their Followers.

Never-

Nevertheless I will not yet take upon me to say that these are *false Prophets*; 'tis Time that must shew that; and a very little Time, 'tis likely, will shew it sufficiently. [' But, all that I affirm now is Matter of Fact, that they call themselves Prophets, that immediate Divine Inspiration is what they pretend to; and that they say with great Confidence, that they are the *Messengers of the Lord of Hosts*, and that all the Discourses which they utter in their Extasies are the *Oracles of God*, and the *Warnings of the Eternal Spirit*.

And who can, now at first, be sure that they are not so? For why may not God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in times past to our Fathers by the *Heb. i. 1.* Prophets, speak also in the like Sort to us their Children? We, indeed, can see no Reason, why, after the full Revelation of the *Everlasting Gospel*, by our Saviour and his Apostles, there should be any new Revelations given, especially to such as do already receive, and profess to give entire Credit to, the *Gospel-Revelation*: But God's Thoughts are not always as our Thoughts, *Isa. lv. 8.* and many Things may be requisite or necessary for some wise and great Purposes, which we, not knowing the Counsels and Designs of Providence, may not see any Reason for. And, as, on the one hand, if we should give Ear and Credit to these Persons, as to the Messengers of God, when indeed the Lord has not sent them, nor spoken by them, we may be led into such Mistakes as may prove fatal to us; so, on the other hand, if we should slight and reject their Warnings, when indeed a Spirit or an Angel has spoken to them, we may be found to have fought against God.] Whether therefore they be true, or whether they be false Prophets, which do now, or which may at any Time hereafter thus take upon them to speak to us in the Name of God; 'tis very good and reasonable Advice which the Apostle here

here gives, in Relation to them; *believe not every Spirit; but try the Spirits, whether they are of God.*

I. Believe not every Spirit. And this first Part of the *Apostle's Advice*, I take to imply in it these four Things.

1. *That we should not readily give any Ear at all to such as pretend to Inspiration. Go not after them, nor follow them,* says our *Saviour*. Indeed to a very strong Proof of any Man's Inspiration, if it be offer'd to us, if it be laid in our way, we ought to yield; at least so far, as to be thereby put upon farther Enquiring into the Matter; because we can't be sure that God will not any more communicate his Will to Men, in such manner as he has formerly done, by the immediate Inspiration of his Holy Spirit: But I say that if no such Evidence of Divine Inspiration be plainly laid before us, without our seeking, we shall not need to go out of our way to seek for it; because we have no Reason at all to doubt but that the Revelation of God's Will already made to us in the Holy Scripture is abundantly sufficient for all those Purposes for which a Divine Revelation might be expected, or could reasonably be desir'd. For this
- Word of God, we are told, is a Lamp unto our Feet, and a Light unto our Path, this, we are assur'd, is able to make us wise unto Salvation; wiser than which we need not desire to be: This, we are assur'd, is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, and for Instruction in Righteousness; that is, for every good Purpose: This, we are assur'd, was given that the Man of God might be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works; and if it was given for this Purpose, there can be no Doubt but that it is sufficient for it. [Or, without considering the Testimony that the Holy Scripture gives of its own Sufficiency, we might otherwise be satisfied that it is sufficient; because the Wisdom of God has not, that we know of, thought fit, in all the Ages since*
- the*

Luk. xvii.

23.

Pf. cxix.

105.

2 Tim. iii.

15,

16,

17.

‘ the *Apostles* Times, to make any other publick Revelation of his Will to Mankind.] And if the Holy Scripture, as rationally interpreted, explained, and applied by the Pastors of the *Christian Church*, and the Preachers of the Gospel, has been sufficient to guide into the way of Truth, and to bring to Eternal Life, all that have been saved in all this time, for sixteen hundred Years past; we may rest assur’d that it is still as sufficient for the same Purposes; And therefore having now all those Books of Holy Scripture in our Hands which have always hitherto, since the *Apostles* Times, serv’d for the Instruction of the *Christian Church*; and being also well furnish’d with Spiritual Guides and Pastors, regularly ordain’d, and lawfully commission’d to Explain and Preach to us the Doctrine of the Gospel; with whom, in Blessing their Ministry, our *Saviour* has promis’d that he will *always be present even unto the End of the World*: As we see no need that there is of new Revelations, so we have no Reason to expect them; and therefore for us, who believe upon such good Grounds the Perfection of Scripture, as a Rule both of Faith and Manners, to *seek out* now for new Lights, would be just the same Folly as it would be to search for a Candle to add Light to the Sun. But,

Matth.
xxviii. 20.

2. What I take to be farther implied in this first Branch of the *Apostles* Advice: *Believe not every Spirit*, is this; *That how confidently soever any Man may give out himself to be an inspir’d Prophet, we should not be forward to believe his Pretences*; And for this there is a very good Reason given in the Text it self, *viz. because many false Prophets are gone out into the World*. And if this was a good Reason then to make Men very shy and cautious of admitting any Man’s Pretence to Inspiration, it is much more so, now; For then, when the *Apostle* gave this Advice, as there were *many false Prophets*, so, we

are sure, there were many true ones too : And [‘ as,
 ‘ when, of the Money that is current abroad, there is
 ‘ some good, as well as some counterfeit, he that takes
 ‘ Money by Tale only may probably take some good, as
 ‘ well as some bad ; and by great good Luck may take
 ‘ none but what is good ; whereas, when the Coin is ge-
 ‘ nerally corrupt, he must have almost the same good
 ‘ Luck if he ever receives any good ; so it is here ;
 ‘ Then,] when there were *true*, as well as *false Apostles*,
 a Man that us’d no Caution might yet by very good hap
 only fall into the Hands of a *true Apostle* ; whereas ever
 since the *Apostle’s* Days, a like uncautious Man must have
 had the same good hap not to fall into the Hands of a
 Seducer ; because ever since the *Apostles* left the World,
 tho’ every Age has produc’d a great many that have
 given out themselves to be inspir’d, we are not sure there
 has been any one that has been really so ; and, as to far
 the greatest Part of them, we have undeniable Evidence,
 that if they were inspir’d at all, it was by an Evil Spirit,
 and not by the Holy Spirit of God. And therefore, ha-
 ving as yet no Inducement to think it is otherwise now
 than it has been for sixteen hundred Years past, nothing
 can be more reasonable than the Caution which the *Apo-*
stle here gives, *not to be forward* to give Credit to any
 that shall now set up with the like Pretences. It is as
 much Favour as any new Prophet can now in Reason de-
 sire (considering what Ground we have to suspect an
 Imposture) that we should not condemn him unheard ;
 but to have any Inclination at all in his Favour ; to ima-
 gine or suppose it likely that he may be a true Prophet,
 before he has given any plain Evidence of a Divine Mis-
 sion, is an Argument of such Weakness, Indiscretion,
 and Unwariness, as we should be asham’d of in any
 Matter of our Worldly Concerns, wherein there was the
 like Uncertainty ; or rather, wherein there was such
 great

great Probability of our being impos'd upon. And therefore,

3. Another thing meant, as I suppose, to be imply'd in this first Part of the *Apostle's* Advice, *Believe not every Spirit*, is, *That we should never accept any Person whatsoever as inspir'd, without his first giving good Proof of his Divine Inspiration.* What Proof, in this Case is sufficient, and may be reasonably requir'd, I shall have Occasion to consider by and by ; but very good and sufficient Proof, I say, is what we ought to insist upon and demand, before we give any Credit at all to any Man that pretends to Inspiration. Because, there being, as the *Apostle* here says, *many false Prophets in the World*; that is, many that falsely pretend to Inspiration, 'tis possible at least, 'tis as likely as not, that the Man that comes to us with this Pretence is an Impostor ; Or if he be not, yet, so long as he gives no Evidence of his Inspiration, we are guilty of no Fault in not receiving him as an inspir'd Prophet ; for it can never be a Fault, not to believe without Reason ; and that's no Reason to us which does appear. Nay indeed, supposing him to be really inspir'd, yet, while he gives no Proof of his Inspiration, so far is our Refusing to receive him, as an inspir'd Prophet, from being a Fault, that it is no more than we are bound in Duty to do ; we should be to blame if we receiv'd him ; we do well and wisely in rejecting him : For it would be just the same Rashness and Indiscretion in us (though perhaps it might not be attended with the like hurtful Consequences) to receive, as an inspir'd Prophet, a Man that is really inspir'd, while as yet there is no Evidence appearing of his being so inspir'd, as it would be to give Credit to an Impostor. And besides, it may also probably be a Mistake of much worse Consequence, to receive as an inspired Prophet a Man that is not inspired, than it would be not to receive

nor

as such, a Man that is really inspir'd : For if we receive as an inspir'd Prophet a Man that is not inspir'd, we run a Hazard of being deceiv'd by him to our **Eternal** Ruin ; whereas, if, for want of sufficient Evidence of Inspiration, we should not give Credit to a Man that is really inspir'd, the only Hazard we seem to run, is, of not knowing some Truths which might be upon some Accounts useful to be known, but without the Knowledge of which we may do very well ; because the Holy Scripture alone, we are well assur'd, *is able to make us wise unto Salvation.*

4. Lastly ; What must be still farther meant to be implied in this first Branch of the *Apostles* Advice, *Believe not every Spirit*, is this : *That we should not ever take any Man's Word only for his being an inspired Prophet.* The Reason is, because if we admit, as of sufficient Force to prove Inspiration, a Man's own Affirmation that he is inspir'd, we must *believe every Spirit*, directly contrary to the *Apostle's* Warning. For 'tis not to be suppos'd that any Man that is desirous to be taken for an inspir'd Prophet, will ever be wanting in giving ample Testimony to himself. [' Either therefore this Proof of Divine Inspiration must be wholly set aside ; or else we must allow of it, by whomsoever it is offer'd ; and whoever gives out himself to be a Prophet, must forthwith, without further Examination, be receiv'd as such.]

But upon these Terms, our Blessed *Saviour* himself, who was certainly sent by God, did not require or expect that Credit should be given to him ; Nay he expressly acknowledges, *Joh. v. 31.* that if he had not given other Proof of his Divine Mission, his own Testimony, by it self, had not been credible. *If, I says he, I bear Witness of my self, my Witness is not true.*

And yet the Matter which a Man witnesses concerning himself may be true, tho' his witnessing it be not alone

None a sufficient Proof of its Truth. *Tho' I bear Record* Joh. viii
of my self, says our Saviour in another Place, *yet my Re-¹⁴*
cord is true, for I know whence I came. Altho' therefore
 we are not to give entire Credit to any Man that confi-
 dently affirms his own Inspiration; for if we should do
 that, we must believe every Impostor; yet if the Man
 that gives out himself to be inspir'd, be otherwise a Man
 of Probity, Honesty and Modesty; if he has always be-
 fore been thought to have a clear Head and a sound Judg-
 ment, and was never known or suspected to be subject
 to Vapours and Whimsies; and if when he affirms his
 own Inspiration, he does it in a grave and becoming
 Manner, and with all the Appearance that is possible of
 Truth and Sincerity and Self-Perfwasion; And, lastly if
 there be nothing in the Matter which he utters, as by
 Divine Inspiration, that is Blasphemous, Impious, Wick-
 ed, unworthy of God, or apparently contrary to sound
 Doctrine; (in these Cases, I say) the Man's own con-
 stant Affirmation that he is inspir'd, may very reasonably
 put us upon farther Enquiring into the Matter, in Order
 to the obtaining the fullest Satisfaction that we can a-
 bout it.

And this leads me to Discourse of the second Branch
 of the *Apostle's* Advice in the Text, very fitly subjoyn'd
 to the former, *viz.*

II. *Try the Spirits, whether they are of God.* For there
 being *many false Prophets*, or false Pretenders to Inspira-
 tion, *in the World*, 'tis not reasonable that we should,
 before, or without Trial, *believe every Spirit*; and yet,
 on the other side, being well assur'd that there have been
 formerly several that have been divinely inspir'd, and
 that have spoken *as they were mov'd by the Holy Ghost*; and
 being not absolutely certain that there never will be
 any more such Persons, neither is it reasonable that we
 should immediately Damn, as a Cheat and Impostor,
 every

every Man that gives out this Pretence, while as yet no Signs or Tokens of Imposture do appear ; but the right and the wise way is, to wait a-while e're we give Judgment ; and before we either receive or reject, to *try the Spirits whether they are of God.*

But how, it may be ask'd, shall we try them ? What Proof of any Man's being inspir'd, who pretends himself so, may reasonably be requir'd, or expected ?

I answer, in general, such as other Prophets, formerly sent by God, have been enabled to give ; such as *Moses*, the Lawgiver of the *Jews*, and such as *Christ* and his *Apostles*, the first Preachers of the Gospel, did give. For every Man that pretends to teach as by Inspiration, takes upon him to be a special Ambassador sent from Heaven on some extraordinary Message ; And no Man is ever receiv'd as an Ambassador till he shews his *Credential Letters.*

More particularly ; There are two Proofs of Divine Inspiration, One or the Other, or Both, of which we may with good Reason demand of any Man that sets up with this Pretence ; [' Especially, in case the Revelation ' he pretends to have had, be of publick Concern, and ' he requires in the Name of God that we should give ' him Credit :] And they are *Prophecy*, and *Miracles.*

1. *Prophecy*, or the foretelling Things to come. This way *Moses* and *Christ* and his *Apostles* made Proof of their Divine Mission ; They foretold some Things that were not to be till many Years after, as well as others which were then shortly to come to pass ; and those too Events not depending on the necessary Working of Natural Causes, but only on the Pleasure of God, or the Will of free Agents : Which kind of Events, we have Reason to think, can't be foreknown by any but God, nor be certainly foretold but by Revelation from God. According to that of the *Prophet, Isaiah xli. 23. Shew the Things that*

that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are Gods.

But then this Proof of divine Inspiration, tho' it be indeed as good as any that can be given, is a convincing Proof to those only who happen to live either at, or after, the Time when the Prophecy is fulfilled : It is no Proof at all, it is an Amusement only, to those who live but at the Time when the Prophecy is first given out. Because 'tis a Course of Time, which that Generation of Men may never live to see, that must shew whether the thing foretold does come to pass or no, ' [and consequently, whether the Man that foretold it was a true ' or a false Prophet.] There is therefore,

2. Another Proof of divine Inspiration that may with good Reason be expected and requir'd of any Man, at the very Time when he utters his pretended divine Revelations ; and that is, *Miracles*. Thus *Moses* prov'd his divine Mission to those to whom he was sent ; And thus our *Saviour* and his *Apostles* prov'd their divine Mission to those to whom they first preach'd the Gospel ; They did *the Works of God*, that is, such Works as could not be done but by the Power of God.

This therefore, I say, is what may now also be reasonably expected from those who do now a-days pretend to Inspiration, and declare that they are sent by God on an extraordinary Message to us. Let them, as *Moses* did, *turn the Water into Blood*, and the *Dust into Lice* ; and *divide the Channel of the Sea*, so that Men may pass thro' it, as on dry Land : Or let them, as our *Saviour* and his *Apostles* did, with only a Word speaking, *heal the Sick*, cure the *Cripples*, give *Sight* to the *Blind*, *cast out Devils*, and *raise the Dead* ; Or let them, as the *Apostles* did, speak with Understanding in *Languages* which they never learn'd ; and then we shall have some Reason to listen to what they have to say to us, but till then we shall

shall have none ; till then we shall be blameless in not Believing them, even tho' they be true Prophets. For even of himself our *Saviour* says, *Joh. xv. 24. If I had not done among them the Works that none other Man did, they had not had Sin.* And if the Unbelieving *Jews* would not have been to blame in not believing *Christ*, unless he had prov'd his divine Mission by Miracles ; by the same Reason neither shall we be now to blame, if we hearken not to these new Prophets (even supposing them to be true Prophets) unless they also give the like Proof of their divine Mission. And of himself, whom yet, most certainly, *the Father had sanctify'd and sent into the world*, he says again, *Joh. x. 37. If I do not the works of my Father believe me not.* And if He, *the Son of God*, was not to be believ'd upon other Terms than his working of Miracles, much less is any other Man. In not believing therefore these new Pretenders to Revelation, unless they shall also work Miracles to prove their Mission, 'tis plain we are safe ; but if we should believe them, we know not what Hazard we may run of being deceiv'd by them. '[And by the same Reason that we believe ' their Confident Pretence to Revelation, upon their own ' Testimony only, without Miracles ; we must believe ' the like Pretence of any other Persons that shall ever ' come to us with the like Confidence ; that is, we must ' give up our selves to be deluded by every Impostor.]

But perhaps it will be said, That however there might be need of Miracles to prove the divine Mission of *Moses*, because 'twas a *New Law* which God gave to the *Jews* by him ; and of our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*, because the Matter of their Revelation was likewise, in great measure, *new* ; and, not only so, but did also, in part, abolish the Law that had been before given by *Moses* ; yet there is not the same Reason to require or expect Miracles from those who tho' they pretend to Inspiration

spiration, yet do not profess to be Authors of a new Revelation, or Preachers of another Gospel ; because a Revelation that has been once well confirm'd by Miracles, shall not need to be so confirm'd again ; at least, not to such as believe the History of those Miracles whereby it was formerly confirm'd.

And this indeed is true ; But then I say likewise, that as there is no need of Miracles to prove the Truth of a Revelation which has been already well prov'd by Miracles, and which by credible History we are assured has been so confirm'd ; so neither is there any need of fresh Inspiration for the Teaching of a Doctrine which has been already fully taught by Persons divinely inspired, by Persons whose divine Inspiration is acknowledged, and who, tho' they be gone from us, do yet continue to preach to us by those Writings which they have left behind them ; and will continue to do so, for so long as these their Writings shall continue in the World.

And this is now the Case with us ; Our *Saviour*, who, we are sure, came from God, preaches to us, now, as much as he did once to the *Jews*, tho' in another Manner ; in those Sermons of his which are recorded by the Holy *Evangelists* : And the *Apostles*, who were commissioned by our *Saviour* to preach his Gospel, do still preach it, and will ever be preaching it to us, as long as those Books and *Epistles* which they left behind them shall continue in the World, and be known to be theirs ; and these Holy Scriptures have been sufficient for the Instruction of all *Christians* hitherto, ever since the *Apostles* Days ; What need then is there of new Inspiration, if there be no new Matter to be taught ? Or what needs any Man pretend to Inspiration, while, by his own Confession, he preaches no other Doctrine than is already taught in that Holy Scripture, which all those whom

he speaks to do already acknowledge was given by *Inspiration of God?*

- But supposing that the thing is really so as they give out, *viz.* That they are indeed afresh inspir'd by God with the Knowledge of those same Truths which are contained in Scripture; yet still we are safe in not hearkning to them, as to Prophets and inspired Persons, and in not receiving what they utter, as Matter lately reveal'd to them; at least, not till they shall give good Evidence of their divine Mission; because we do already receive, upon the Testimony of the Holy Scripture, all that which they pretend to teach, as by new and fresh Inspiration. And if we do receive, as a divine Truth, and as divinely reveal'd, any Doctrine or Prophecy which is indeed such; what matter's it whether we receive it from this Prophet, or from that? from an Old Prophet, or a New One? from a divine Revelation that was made Seventeen hundred Years ago, or from one that was made but yesterday?

' [In a Word therefore; The Doctrine, whatever it is, of these pretended Prophets, is either Old or New; ' it is either the Doctrine of the Gospel or it is another ' Gospel; Let themselves say which it is. For if they ' shall say the first, *viz.* that their Doctrine is no other ' than the Doctrine of the Gospel; To what Purpose ' then, we may well ask, do you pretend, or with what Truth ' can you pretend, that you are taught it now by immediate divine Inspiration, when, by your own Acknowledgment, you were taught it before, and we may all of us ' learn the same, from the long ago divinely inspir'd ' Scripture? But if they shall say the other, *viz.* that ' the Matter which they are inspir'd with, is New, and ' what we could not have learn'd from the Scripture; ' we may then (as was said before) very reasonably require of them to give such Proof of their Inspiration ' and

and Mission, by Signs and Wonders and mighty Works, as our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*, and all that have ever heretofore been sent by God to publish a new Revelation to the World, have given ; till when, we shall have no Reason to hearken to them at all ; and if we do, it will be at our great Peril.]

But if they shall say, (and that's indeed all that I think they can with any Appearance of Reason farther pretend,) that the Revelations now made to them are partly Old, and partly New ; Inasmuch as, tho' what they now utter as Divine Oracles, be not, in Substance, New, because 'tis no other than what is really and truly contain'd in Scripture, 'tis nevertheless what would not, what perhaps could not, have been discern'd to be therein contain'd, without fresh Illumination ; and that they are now enlightned with a clearer Knowledge of some Truths contain'd in Scripture than any others yet have been ; that they are by special Inspiration of the Spirit, enabled to open the Book that has been always hitherto seal'd up, and to give the true Sense of several dark and obscure Passages in Scripture the Meaning whereof has not hitherto been apprehended, or which have been grossly misunderstood by all former Interpreters, and would perhaps never have been rightly understood but by Inspiration.

In this Case, if this be what they say, there is one thing however that we may very reasonably require and demand of them, before we give them Credit ; viz. that they should make out to us, by Reason, the Truth of that Interpretation of Scripture, which, they say, they have been taught by Revelation ; and if they can and shall do this, we'll readily receive their Interpretation, even tho' we should not believe them to be inspir'd.

And this is no unreasonable Demand, because a true Interpretation of a Text of Scripture, tho' it be suppos'd to be such an one as a Man could not have hit up-

on only by the working of his own Reason, yet when it is found out, may be capable of being made plain to others, by Reasoning and Argumentation.

We have an Instance of this in the Preaching of the *Apostles* ; They, by the Illumination of the *Holy Spirit*, were directed to, and instructed in the Meaning of, all those Passages in the *Old Testament*, whether Types, or Prophecies, which related to the *Messias* ; which, without such Illumination they would not have understood : But then, after that they themselves were let into the Knowledge of them, this Way, they were able by Reasoning to make plain to others the Truth of their Interpretation of those Places, and to shew how exactly applicable they were to, and how punctually they were fulfill'd in our *Saviour Christ*. This may be observ'd in almost all those Sermons of the *Apostles* which are related in the History of their *Acts* ; and likewise in all their *Epistles*.

And of St. Paul in particular it is observ'd, *Acts* xvii. 2, 3. that entring into a Synagoge of the *Jews*, he reason'd with them out of the *Scriptures* ; Opening and alleging that *Christ* must needs have suffered, and risen again from the Dead ; and that that *Jesus* whom he preach'd unto them was *Christ*. And of the same *Apostle*, it is noted in *Acts* ix. 22. that immediately after his own miraculous Conversion, before he had conferr'd with any of the *Apostles*, or heard any of their Sermons, when therefore the good Understanding which he himself had in Scripture must have been chiefly, if not only, from Divine Illumination, he confounded the *Jews* which dwelt at *Damascus*, proving that *Jesus* was the *Christ*. But now how could he prove this, so as to confound and silence the *Jews*, but only by out-reasoning them in the Interpretation that he gave of the *Prophecies* of the *Old Testament* which had foretold the *Messias* ? And it may indeed be difficult to find out the true Key to some ancient

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Prophecy ; but when that is once found out, whether by Study or divine Illumination, it may be easy enough afterwards, by the Help of that Key, to lay the whole Prophecy open, and to make the Interpretation of it clear even to an ordinary Capacity. Let therefore, as I said, our *New Prophets* do thus, and then, without enquiring how they came by their Knowledge, we will readily admit their Interpretation of Scripture.

But if they can't do this, If they can't shew that the Interpretation which they give of Scripture is rational, and the Application which they make of it just and agreeable ; we must then come upon them again with our former Demand, and require of them to demonstrate the Truth of their Interpretation, and the Justness of their Application of Scripture, and likewise their own Truth in pretending to have received this Knowledge from the *holy Spirit*, by their working Miracles. For to give such a Sense of Scripture as true, which can't be made out to be true by a rational Interpretation, is all one, in Effect, as to give out a new Scripture ; and we can't, with good Reason, receive any Discourse or Writing as Scripture, (even tho' it be not contradictory to any former Revelation) upon less Evidence than that upon which we acknowledge the divine Inspiration of that holy Scripture which we have already received.

And this Proof of Inspiration, by Miracles, is indeed what may now with more Reason be demanded of our *New Prophets*, than it could have been of our Saviour *Christ*, or of the Holy *Apostles*.

For the coming of *Christ*, as a Prophet and a Lawgiver, had been long before foretold by former Prophets ; Particularly by *Moses*, Deut. xviii. 15. *A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, of your Brethren, like unto me, him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.* So that tho' our Saviour had wrought no Miracles,

cles, yet his Pretence to a divine Mission had been very credible, because from former Prophecies, the *Jews* had good Reason, just at that Time, to expect such a Prophet as our *Saviour* gave out himself to be. And he himself argu'd sometimes with the *Jews* upon this Foot. *Joh. v. 39. Search the Scriptures, for ——— they are they which testifie of me.*

Joh. xvi.
13.

And so likewise our *Saviour*, after that his own divine Mission had been well prov'd and confirm'd, promis'd and foretold that his *Apostles*, whom he would commission to preach his *Gospel* after his Ascension, should be *guided* by the holy Spirit *into all Truth*; So that if they in their own Persons had wrought no Miracles in Proof of their Inspiration, their Pretence to Inspiration had nevertheless been well and fully enough grounded upon and prov'd by our Lord's Promise and Prediction.

But what Promise in Scripture, what Prediction of *Christ* or his *Apostles*, or of any *ancient Prophets*, can our *new Prophets* produce foretelling *their* Coming, and assuring us of *their* Inspiration? We have many Predictions in Scripture, that *false Christs* and *false Prophets* should *arise*, and *deceive many*; but we have none, that I know of, foretelling, that any should speak or write by immediate Inspiration of the Spirit, after that the holy *Apostles* should have left the World, having first committed to writing all such things as the Spirit of God had dictated to them, and commanded them to write: We have no Prophecy of Scripture, that I know of, foretelling that in after-Ages God would raise up other Prophets like unto them, to whom he would communicate his Will in such Manner as he had done to them, by immediate Inspiration of the *Holy Spirit*. So that the Pretence of our *new Prophets* to such Inspiration, being not founded on Scripture, must fall to the ground, unless it be

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supported by Miracles, there being plainly no other Foundation to rest it sufficiently upon.

Well, but you'll say then, what if these Men should now give such Proof of their Inspiration as we may reasonably require? What if their Predictions should come to pass? Or what if they should do Miracles?

I answer; when this shall be, 'twill be soon enough to resolve that Question; but till then we shall not need to trouble our selves about it. And yet to say somewhat briefly to it now may not be amiss; because it may well be suppos'd, that a Man that already counterfeits Revelations, will not be long before he'll set upon counterfeiting Prophecies or Miracles; I mean whenever he shall have a convenient Opportunity, and shall find his Followers and Admirers in a good Disposition to be deluded; and the *Devil*, we may be sure, whose Interest is highly serv'd by such Delusions, will not be wanting to lend his utmost Assistance towards carrying on the Cheat.

I. Then, let it be suppos'd, that they foretell Things to come; that is, that somethings which they foretell do come to pass; (I mean presently, or within a short time, for if the Accomplishment of their Predictions be not till a long while hence, it may serve for an Argument to our Posterity of such Mens Inspiration; but it can be none to us. In this Case, I say) one thing to be consider'd by us is the Nature of the Event that was foretold; because if it was a thing that was produc'd by the Working of Natural Causes, the foretelling it was not a certain Proof of Divine Inspiration; for the Devil is without doubt a better Natural Philosopher than any Man, and so may foresee, and may inspire his Emissaries to foretell, several Events of this Kind, which no Mortal Man by his own Wit and Skill only, could have foretold. And the only Things which (as I suppose) none but

but God can foreknow, are such Events as depend upon the Working of the Will of some free Agent.

And again, even of these Events, commonly call'd future Contingencies, several, it may well be suppos'd, are already foretold in some dark Prophecies of the Holy Scripture, which, tho' not understood by us, may yet be understood by the *Devil*; who, if not naturally of greater Wit, must yet needs, by his longer Observation, Experience and Study, have attain'd to much greater Skill in such Matters, than any short-liv'd Man can do. So that a true Interpretation of some Scripture-Prophecies which have not hitherto been understood by Man, may possibly be had from the *Devil*, and consequently, is not a sure Proof of Divine Illumination.

Again; If the Events that have been foretold by any pretended Prophet are such, the Foreknowledge whereof, (even by the *Devil* himself) can't be accounted for either of these ways; some Consideration is then to be had of their Number. For when God endues any Man with the Spirit of Prophecy in order to his gaining Belief to some Messages of publick Concern which God has charg'd him with, it can't be suppos'd but that he will enable him to give full and sufficient Proof of his Divine Mission; and a full and sufficient Proof thereof (in case no other Proof of any other kind but only by Prophecy, be given of it) can hardly be given but by a Man's truly foretelling a great many future Events.

And yet, lastly, if a Man should truly foretell a great many future Events, even this would not be a good Proof of Divine Inspiration, in case any One (tho' but One only) of his Predictions should fail to be accomplished in its Time. For a wise and cunning Being, (such as the *Devil*, that *old Serpent*, certainly is) may, by a probable Conjecture only, foretell several future Contingencies, and may rarely be out in his Guess; so that

that a Man may be only an Emissary or Instrument of the *Devil* who does truly foretell some such Things; and it is certain he is no other, in case there be a Failure in any one of those Predictions which he gives forth, as by Divine Inspiration; because the Spirit of God, which searcheth all Things, and *understands* even the *Thoughts* of Men *long before*, cannot be deceived in any thing. And this Rule is plainly given in the Scripture it self, *Deut. xxi. 22. And if thou say in thy Heart, How shall we know the Word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a Prophet speaketh in the Name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken; but the Prophet hath spoken it presumptuously.* But,

2. Let it be farther suppos'd that a Man now pretending to Inspiration seems also to do Miracles; 'tis to be remembred, that it is foretold, that the *Coming of the 2^d Thes. Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition, is after the Working of Satan, with all Power, and Signs, and lying Wonders.* So that tho' true Miracles are undoubtedly a good, perhaps the best, and for the present the most convincing Evidence of Divine Inspiration, yet there is in this Case great room for Deceit, and consequently great need of Caution. Two Things especially, there are, in this Case, needful to be carefully enquir'd into;

First, the Truth of the Fact; we should be well assur'd that the wonderful Thing said to be done, was really done; And for this Purpose it may be requir'd that it should be done either in our own Sight and Presence, or in the Sight and Presence of *many* other credible Persons; *several* of whom should (without any Contradiction from any other Persons that were then present) testify the same, as a Matter of their own certain Knowledge.

And when we shall have received this Satisfaction as to the Fact, it will be then farther needful to be strictly

enquir'd into, whether it was a true Miracle, that is, whether it was an Operation plainly exceeding the known Power of Natural Causes, and of Evil Spirits; as 'tis evident most of the Miracles of *Moses*, and our Blest Saviour were. [' Exceeding, I say, the known ' Power of *evil Spirits*, as well as of *natural Causes*; and ' how great *their* Power is, we can hardly certainly ' know, only we may very reasonably think, that *the* Eph. ii. 2. ' Prince of the Power of the Air, as the Devil is call'd in ' Scripture, is able to do far greater Things than any ' that as yet have been so much as reported to have ' been done by our *new Prophets*.]

Well, but you'll say, supposing that thus far also we should receive all the Satisfaction that we can reasonably desire; that is, that the wondrous Work which we are fully perswaded was done by some pretended Prophet, after the best Trial and Examination that we can make of it, does appear to be Miraculous, may we then reasonably give Ear to what the Man has to say to us?

Yes truly, I think we may; nay indeed I think we shall be to blame if we do not. But yet, I do not say, that immediately upon this we ought to receive, as a Divine Oracle, every Thing that this Man shall utter. If, says *Moses*, Deut. xiii. 1. *There arise among you a Prophet or a Dreamer of Dreams, and giveth thee a Sign or a Wonder, and the Sign or the Wonder come to pass whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other Gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them. Thou shalt not hearken unto the Words of that Prophet, or that Dreamer of Dreams; for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God, with all your Heart, and with all your Soul. And our Saviour himself tells us, Matth. xxiv. 24. That there shall arise false Christs and false Prophets, and shall shew great Signs and Wonders, in-somuch, that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very Elect.*

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But what's then to be done? If false Prophets may give the same Tokens to appearance of a Divine Mission that true Prophets have done, how shall we do to know certainly which are true, and which are false?

I answer, even in this Case (which yet we may well think does very rarely happen) there is one other Method of *trying* the *Spirits*, *whether they are of God*, which we may be certain will not fail or deceive us; and that is, by their Doctrines: What therefore we should have to do, if ever we should meet with such an appearing Evidence of any Man's Inspiration, as we could not after the strictest Search discern any Fraud in, would be to Examine well the Nature of those Doctrines which he teaches, as by God's Command and Authority, and to observe whether they be *according to Godliness*, whether they be worthy of God. And if they are not so, we ought not either to receive the Doctrines, or to accept the Man as a Prophet, no not even upon the strongest Evidence that can be given of Inspiration; because it is a Contradiction to the Truth and Holiness of God, that he should ever Commission any Man to teach any Doctrine, contrary to Truth or Holiness. For *he abideth Faithful*, as the *Apostle* says, *2 Tim. ii. 13. he cannot deny himself*; and it would be to deny himself, to Commission any Man either to withdraw his Creatures from their due Obedience to him; or to invalidate the Credit of former Divine Revelations; or to teach any Doctrine derogating from his Eternal and Essential Attributes, his Justice, Holiness, Goodness or Truth; or to set up other Gods; or to entice Men to Idolatry; or to prescribe, or so much as to give License or any Encouragement to Impiety, Prophane-ness, Falshood, Lying, Perjury, Deceit, Injustice, Uncleanness, Intemperance, or any moral Wickedness. And therefore our *Saviour*, in *Matth. vii. 16.* immediately after he had given a Caution to *beware of false Prophets*, add^s these

2 Cor. xi.
13, 14.

these Words, *Ye shall know them by their Fruits*, that is, by the Fruits of their Doctrines; by the Nature and Tendency of them; so that whatever Appearance a Man may make of Honesty, [*For Satan himself is transform'd into an Angel of Light; therefore it is no great thing if his Ministers also be transform'd as the Ministers of Righteousness,*] or what Proof soever he may give of his Truth, or what Evidence soever of Divine Inspiration; we may be most certain that he is not a Messenger from God, if the Matter of his Doctrine be contrary either to the Principles of Natural Religion, or to the eternal Laws of Reason, or to the Truth of a former Divine Revelation. *If we says St. Paul, or any Man, or even an Angel from Heaven preach any other Gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, and which ye have receiv'd; Let him be accursed.*

Galat. i.
8, 9.

Thus we are to try the Spirits whether they are of God; which, if we do, sincerely, and with true Love to God and Truth; the blessed Consequence will be, that, how much soever false Prophets do abound, and however evil Men and Seducers may wax worse and worse, *deceiving and being deceived*, we shall be aware of their Devices; and being not like Children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every Wind of Doctrine, by the slight of Man, and cunning Craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, shall hold fast the Profession of our Faith without wavering; and continue in the Things we have been taught, knowing of whom we have learn'd them; and be stedfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the Work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our Labour is not in vain in the Lord.

2 Tim. iii.
13.

Eph. iv.
14.

Heb. x.

23.

2 Tim. iii.

14.

1 Cor. xv.

51.

Which God grant, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.
To whom, &c.

F I N I S.